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ABSTRACT

Two concurrent exhibits at the U.S. Military Academy from October 1976 to January 1977 were devoted to the paintings and book illustrations of Professor Robert W. Weir, head of the Department of Drawing at the Academy from 1834 to 1876, and to drawings done by cadets under his instruction. In addition to a catalog of the works on display, this volume contains studies of Weir's accomplishments as an illustrator, a teacher, and a poet. It is illustrated throughout with examples of works from the exhibits. (JAB)

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ROBERT W. WEIR OF WEST POINT

ILLUSTRATOR, TEACHER AND POET

An Exhibition jointly sponsored

by

The United States Military Academy Library

and

The West Point Museum

11 October 1976 through 6 January 1977
United States Military Academy Library

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Catalog designed and edited by

Michael E. Moss, Curator of Art

West Point Museum

UNITED STATES MILITARY ACADEMY

West Point, New York

1976

IR005939

UNITED STATES MILITARY ACADEMY LIBRARY OCCASIONAL PAPERS

1. *U.S. Military Academy Library Map Collection: The Period of the American Revolution 1783-1800*, 1971.

2. *The Faulkner Collection at West Point and the Faulkner Concordances*, 1974.

3. *Antoine-Henri Jomini: A Bibliographical Survey*, 1975.

4. *Robert W. Weir of West Point: Illustrator, Teacher and Poet*, 1976.

Cover photograph courtesy of U.S. Military Academy Archives

FOREWORD

An abiding appreciation of the arts is well known to those who reside in New York's Mid-Hudson Valley. This long-term commitment to artistic expression has greatly contributed to the realization of two concurrent shows of the works of Professor Robert W. Weir.

It is appropriate that these exhibitions are being held at West Point's Cadet Activities Building, Eisenhower Hall, and at the U.S. Military Academy's Library. Robert Weir was the Academy's distinguished head of the Department of Drawing from 1834 to 1876. Not only was he prominent in nineteenth century artistic and literary circles, he was mentor to such artists as James McNeill Whistler and Truman Seymour. Weir's paintings are displayed in the Class of 1929 Gallery in Eisenhower Hall. The Library show focuses on Weir's book illustrations and the cadet drawings done under his instruction.

Major credit for conceiving this exhibition goes to our neighbor, Professor William Cullen Bryant, II. Dr. Bryant's detailed knowledge of Weir and his contemporaries is reflected in the lead essay.

To Michael E. Moss, Curator of Art at the West Point Museum, go our thanks both for his painstaking compilation of this catalog and for his direction of the entire exhibition. Mr. Moss' essay focuses on many extant cadet drawings of remarkable quality which reflect Weir's expert instruction. Captain Joseph Cox's essay on Weir's poetry helps us to sharpen our perception of the artist's character through his writings.

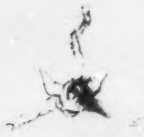
To Captain John A. Calabro for mustering the support of the Cadet Fine Arts Forum and to Susan Lemke, Marie Capps, and Elizabeth M. Lewis, all of the USMA Library staff, for their assistance in bibliographically describing, in locating, and in formulating artistic judgments go our special thanks. We are indeed grateful for the scholarly assistance and support of Dr. James Callow and of the Reverend and Mrs. DeWolf Perry for bringing to our attention new information regarding Weir's book illustrations.

To Joseph M. Barth of the USMA Library staff and to Warren Miller of the Instruction Support & Information Systems Division for obtaining photographs for this catalog; to Sharon Moran, USMA Library staff, for her superb typing support; to Leona Patton of the West Point Museum for preparing the exhibition labels and to Linda Gannon of Ladycliff College for her assistance with the installation, we extend our appreciation. And finally to John T. Hanretta and Andrew F. Hodge of the West Point Printing Plant for their patient cooperation during the planning and printing of this catalog our debt is owed.

The Library exhibition would not have been possible without the generous loans of rare materials from the New York Public Library, the Newburgh Free Library, and the Putnam County Historical Society.

To all these individuals and libraries we are more than grateful for the success of this bicentennial event.

EGON WEISS
Librarian, USMA



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THE NEW-YORK MIRROR

Title page vignette for *The New-York Mirror*. Steel engraving by A.B. Durand after Weir. Vignette repeated in succeeding volumes from 1831.

Lent by The Putnam County Historical Society Cold Spring, New York.

ROBERT WEIR AS ILLUSTRATOR

by

WILLIAM CULLEN BRYANT, II

Robert Weir's unusual versatility as an artist, quite evident in the current exhibition of his paintings and drawings at the Military Academy[1], extends as well to his work as a magazine and book illustrator. Recommending his friend Weir in 1834 for the post of drawing teacher at West Point, poet-editor William Cullen Bryant wrote Secretary of War Lewis Cass, "Mr. Weir possesses a high reputation among his brethren of the art. . . in the several departments of portrait, landscape and historical painting."[2] That reputation among Weir's fellow artists had grown rapidly since his return to New York City in 1827 after three years of study in Italy.

In 1828 Weir was invited to give a series of lectures on perspective before the academicians and students of the newly organized National Academy of the Arts of Design.[3] Repeating his lectures the following year, he was elected to membership in the Academy, and soon afterward to its executive council. During the seven years between his return from abroad and his removal to West Point, he was one of the most prolific contributors to the National Academy's annual exhibitions.[4] And his frequent collaboration in publications by the artists and writers of the Sketch Club won him prominence as an illustrator.

In the years 1828-1830 Bryant, Robert Sands and Guilian Verplanck brought out an annual gift book, *The Talisman*, which was among the first and best of many such "Christmas and New Years Offerings" popular in the second quarter of the nineteenth century. Sketch Club artists Thomas Cole, Henry Inman, Samuel Morse, and Weir, among others, furnished paintings and drawings to accompany poems and tales by their fellow members, the writers. The illustrations were readied for printing by such skillful engravers as George W. Hatch and Asher B. Durand. To the second and third of these volumes Weir contributed five illustrations. These were his *Greek Boy* (Fig. 1), accompanying Bryant's poem of that name; *Red Jacket* (Fig. 2), with Fitz-Greene Halleck's poem by the same title; *The Dying Greek* (Fig. 3), illustrating Verplanck's tale, "Telemachus Moritis"; *Rome* (Fig. 4) with Verplanck's "The Peregrinations of Petrus Mudd", and *Phanette des Gantelmes* (Fig. 5), with Bryant's tale.

Fig. 1 *Greek Boy* (detail), *The Talisman for MDCCXXIX* New York: Elam Bliss, 1828. Frontispiece. Full dimentions of plate: H. 3½" x W. 2 5/8". Engraved by Asher B. Durand after Weir.

Lent by the General Research and Humanities Division of The New York Public Library; Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations

Fig. 2 *Red Jacket* (detail), *The Talisman for MDCCXXIX* New York: Elam Bliss, 1828. Opposite page 153. Full dimentions of plate: H. 3 3/4" x W. 2½". Engraved by George Hatch after Weir.

Lent by the General Research and Humanities Division of The New York Public Library; Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations

Fig. 3 *The Dying Greek, The Talisman for MDCCXX* New York: Elam Bliss, 1829 Opposite page 29. H. 3" x W. 3 3/4". Engraving.

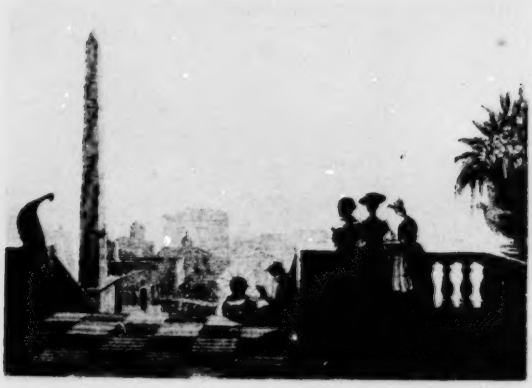

Fig. 4 *Rome, The Talisman for MDCCXX* New York: Elam Bliss, 1829. Opposite page 80. H. 2 7/8" x W. 3 3/4". Engraving.

Courtesy of the General Research and Humanities Division of The New York Public Library; Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations

Fig. 5 *Phanette des Gantelmes* from *The Talisman for MDCCXX* New York: Elam Bliss, 1829. Opposite page 238. H. 3 3/4" x W. 3". Engraving.

Courtesy of the General Research and Humanities Division of The New York Public Library; Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations

The first two of these illustrations received wide notice, because of the prominence of their subjects. The Seneca Indian chief Red Jacket was just then being lionized in New York theatres and museums, sporting around his neck the great silver medal given him in 1792 by President Washington, and telling his audiences of his recent reception by President Jackson at the White House.[4] Weir's portrait of Red Jacket won wider recognition through the popularity of Halleck's verses.[5] And American sympathy for the Greek people in their struggle against their Turkish oppressors in the 1820's gave Weir's portrait of the *Greek Boy* an equal timeliness. Its subject was a handsome lad, Christos Evangelides, who had been orphaned in his country's revolution and brought to New York by an American sea captain to be educated at Columbia College. Bryant's characterization of the boy as embodying classic beauty and spirit---

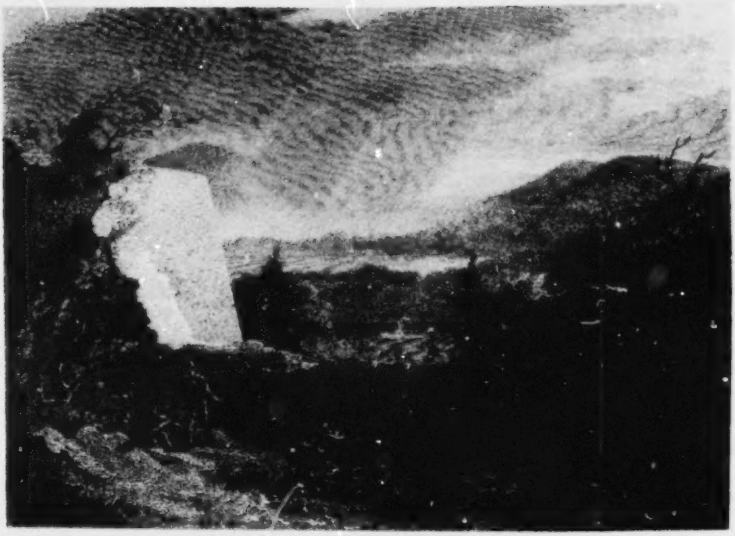

Fig. 6 *Fort Putnam* from *The American Landscape:* No. 1. New York: Elam Bliss, 1830. Page 11. H. 4¼" x W. 6 1/8". Etched by James Smillie and finished by Asher B. Durand after Weir.

Lent by William Cullen Bryant, II, Garrison, New York

"A shoot of that old vine that made
The nations silent in its shade"

---was personified in Weir's picture.[6]

Weir seems not to have exhibited landscape paintings of the Hudson Highlands until after his appointment at West Point in 1834, though his fine study of *Fort Putnam* (Fig. 6) in another Sketch Club publication, *The American Landscape,* shows that like his fellow artists; William J. Bennett, George Catlin, George Cooke, Raphael Hoyle, and William Guy Wall, he was an early Hudson River traveler and sketcher.

Fig 7 *View of the Old City Hall, Wall St.* from *The New York Mirror IX*, 19 November 1831, opposite page 153. H. 5 7/8" x W. 8 7/8". Steel engraving by Hatch and Smillie. Drawn by Diedrich Knickerbocker, Jr. and copied by Weir. This view depicts the City Hall in the year 1789.

Lent by the Putnam County Historical Society, Cold Spring, New York

In 1831, Weir became an illustrator for the popular weekly magazine, the *New York Mirror*, edited by one of the most successful literary entrepreneurs of his day, George Pope Morris, of Cold Spring-on-the-Hudson. At first, Weir's contributions included several architectural designs --- reflecting, perhaps, the lectures on perspective he continued for some years to deliver before the National Academy, as well as offering a foretaste of the instruction in topographical drawing which would occupy much of his time as a West Point instructor. Such for instance, were the plates engraved by Hatch and James Smillie from Weir's drawings of *Old City Hall* (Fig. 7) and *Lunatic Asylum* (Fig. 8). But Weir also furnished several scenes which prefigured his later eminence as a landscape painter.

Fig. 8 *Lunatic Asylum, New York* from *The New-York Mirror, XI,* 1 February 1834, opposite page 241. H. 6 1/8" x W. 9". Steel engraving by James Smillie.

Lent by The Newburgh Free Library, Newburgh, New York.

Like most of his fellow artists, the subjects of Weir's early drawings drew largely from biblical, historical and literary sources. Among his first paintings in National Academy shows were several with titles such as *Peter and John Curing the Lame, The Presentation in the Temple, The Landing of Hendrick Hudson* and *Bourbon's Last March* as well as scenes from the writings of Dante, Shakespeare, Cervantes and Scott. But by the time he was settled at West Point in 1834 his contributions began to include a number of landscapes each year, and this interest was now reflected in his illustrations for *The New-York Mirror,* and for the publications of his friends, particularly those of Bryant.

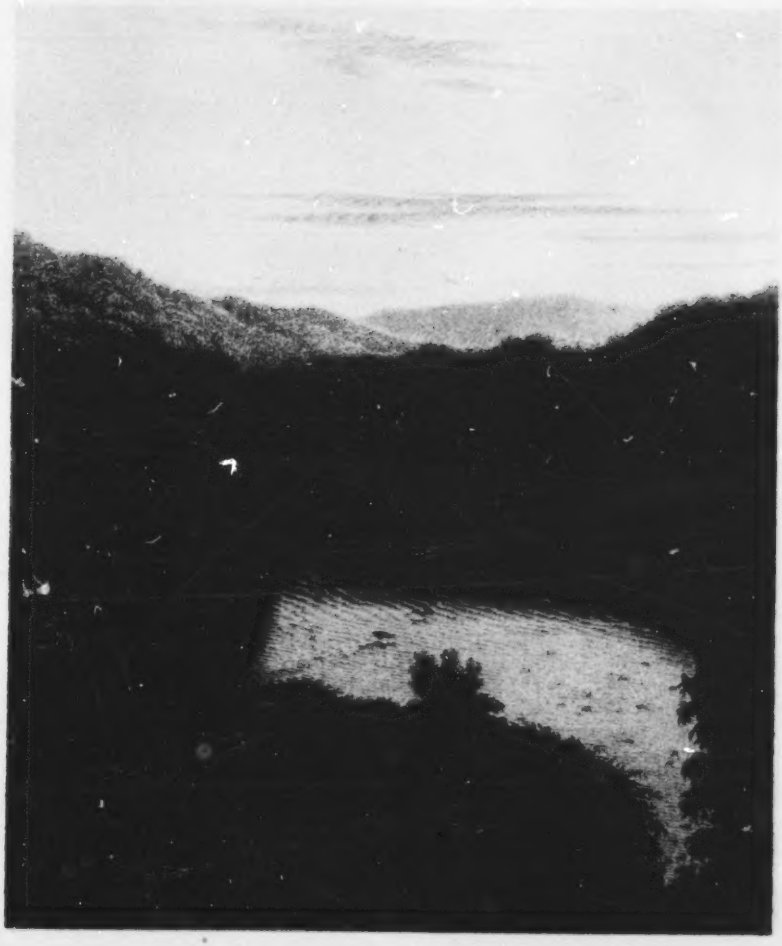

Fig. 9 *Evening, A Scene in the Hudson Highlands, N.Y.* from *The New-York Mirror, XII*, 28 March 1835, opposite page 305. H. 8" x W. 6 5/8". Steel engraving by James Smillie after Weir.

Lent by the Newburgh Free Library, Newburgh, New York.

Fig. 10 "...*enter this wild wood,/And view the haunts of Nature.*" from *Poems by William Cullen Bryant*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1836. Title vignette. H. 2⅛" x W. 3". Engraved by T. H. Cushman after Weir.

Lent by William Cullen Bryant, II, Garrison, New York.

Several of these accompanied the texts of Bryant poems. Thus, Weir's *A Scene in the Highlands* (Fig. 9) pictured the flight of a wild goose, "Lone wandering, but not lost, "through the fading sunset, in "To a Waterfowl". In 1836 the poet asked Weir to furnish a title page vignette for a new edition of his poetry, in illustration of his "Inscription for the Entrance to a Wood." (Fig. 10). Soon after the completion of this---the first of many illustrations in Bryant's successive editions---poet and painter spent a weekend together at West Point. Bryant reported that the artist had shown him a "beautiful landscape view of Fort Putnam," and that they had then ridden on horseback seven miles through the mountains to a "solitary lake," where they faced a striking view.

Fig. 11 *Falls of Kaaterskill.* H. 24¼" x W. 18¼".
Oil on canvas.

Courtesy of Kennedy Galleries, Inc., New York

> We stood on a steep precipice several hundred feet above it---the rocks about us were black as ink with a peculiar kind of moss, and were crowned with rough looking pitch pine trees full of large cones as black as the rocks; below us lay the lake, quiet and glassy, with large patches of the broad-leaved water lily on its amber coloured waters; shores were clothed with a thick wood to the water's edge, and to the west rose mountain behind mountain all covered with the natural forest.[8]

This description suggests such a scene as was often painted by Weir. One writer has proposed that his landscapes of Highland scenes convey a personal charm, "revealing something of that mystical illumination, that haunting aloofness, that was the inheritance of his Scots blood."[9] In truth, one senses contrasting moods in Weir's treatment of two more of Bryant's poetic subjects: in the cold, misty naturalism of his *Falls of the Kaaterskill* (Fig. 11), on the one hand, and in his quietly devout "A Forest Hymn", on the other, with its epigraph, the concluding lines of Bryant's poem:

> . . . Be it ours to meditate,
> In these calm shades, thy milder majesty,
> And to the beautiful order of thy works
> Learn to conform the order of our lives.[10]

In the first of these pictures, as in the lonely lake scenes of which Weir seems to have been so fond, we may find the impetus for Edgar Allen Poe's unique impression, in "Ulalume," of Robert Weir's landscape art:

> The skies they were ashen and sober;
> The leaves they were crisped and sere--
> The leaves they were withering and sere;
> It was night in the lonesome October
> Of my most immemorial year;
> It was hard by the dim lake of Auber,
> In the misty mid region of Weir--
> It was down by the dank tarn of Auber
> In the ghoul-haunted woodland of Weir.[11]

Fig. 12 *Cro' Nest, From Above West Point, on the Hudson River* from *The Culprit Fay and other Poems by Joseph Rodman Drake.* New York: George Dearborn, 1835. Title vignette. H. 2 3/4" x W. 3 7/8". Engraved by James Smillie after Weir.

Lent by the General Research and Humanities Division of The New York Public Library; Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations

In the second picture, we are made mindful of Weir's religious paintings, and of his devotional verses--- such, for instance, as "The Round of the Waters". Weir was indeed, in Bryant's characterization, "a man of great simplicity of character and depth of feeling."[12]

A number of other publications reflect the diversity of Weir's literary friendships and concerns: his view of *Cro' Nest*...(Fig. 12) illustrating Joseph Rodman Drake's poem "The Culprit Fay", his posthumous portrait of *Robert Sands* (Fig. 13),the marginal sketches he provided for Verplanck's edition of Shakespeare's plays (Fig. 14), his illustrations for the poems of George Pope Morris (Figures 15,16,and 17) and for the fanciful cover drawings on Jonathan Barnard's sheet music, set to Tennyson's songs and Weir's own "The Round of the Waters" (Fig. 34).

Fig. 13 *Robert Sands* from *The Writings of Robert Sands in Prose and Verse.* New York: Harper & Brothers, 1834. Vol. I, opposite title page. H. 4¼" x W. 3 3/4". Engraved by Asher B. Durand after Weir.

Lent by William Cullen Bryant, II, Garrison, New York.

61 20

Fig. 15 *When Other Friends Are Round Thee from Poems by George Pope Morris.* New York: Charles Scribner, 1853. Opposite page 104. H. 4" x W. 2 3/4". Engraved by Alfred Jones after Weir.

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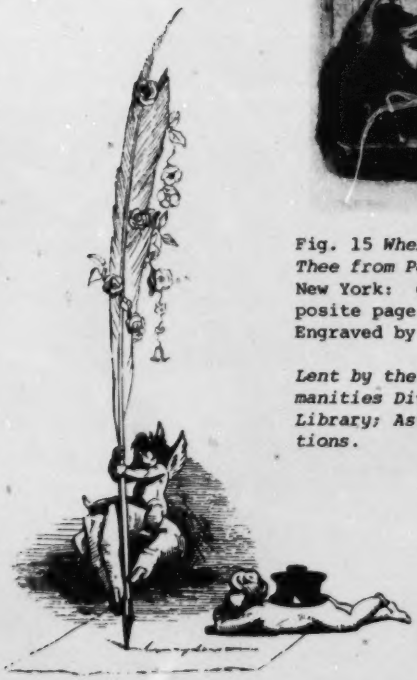

Fig. 14 Marginal Illustration for *Love's Labour's Lost* from *Shakespeare's Plays: With His Life.* Ed. Gulian C. Verplanck. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1847. II, p. (8).

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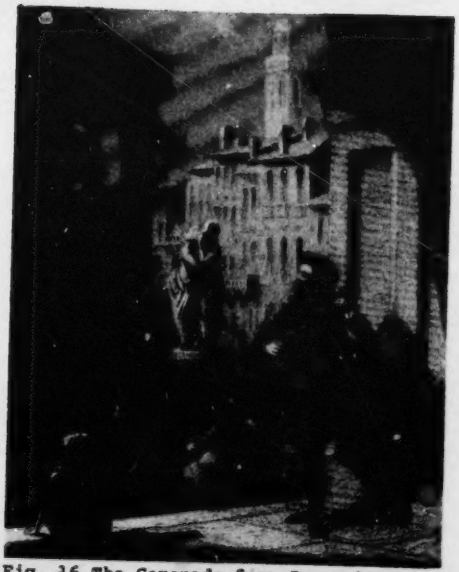

Fig. 16 *The Serenade* from *Poems by George Pope Morris*. New York: Charles Scribner, 1853. Opposite page 177. H. 4 3/4" x W. 3 3/8". Engraved by Alfred Jones after Weir.

Lent by the General Research and Humanities Division of The New York Public Library; Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations.

Fig. 17 Illustration for "The Whip-Poor-Will": from *The Deserted Bride and Other Poems* by George Pope Morris. New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1843. Opposite page 138. H. 2¼" x W. 3".

Lent by the General Research and Humanities Division of The New York Public Library; Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations.

Fig. 18 *Church of the Holy Innocents* for *The Home Book of the Picturesque*, published in 1852. H. 4" x W. 5¼". Engraved by S.V. Hunt after Weir.

Special Collections Division, U.S. Military Academy Library.

The variety of Weir's illustrative work is evident, as well , in his vignettes for *The New-York Mirror* (illustrated page 6), engravings for the magazine of his portraits of the nation's presidents, and his realistic view of *Washington's Headquarters at Newburgh* (Fig. 19), published in 1834, which contrasts sharply with his idealization, for *The Home Book of the Picturesque* in 1852, of *The Church of the Holy Innocents* at Highland Falls, which he had designed and built in memory of two of his children who had died in infancy (Fig. 18).

Fig. 19 (opposite page) *Washington's Headquarters at Newburgh* from *The New-York Mirror, XII*, No. 26, 27 December 1834, opposite page (201). H. 6" x W. 9". Steel engraving by James Smillie after Weir.

Lent by the Newburgh Free Library, Newburgh, New York.

Fig. 20 *Christmas Card* inspired by Clement C. Moore's, "A Visit from St. Nicholas". Painted by Weir in 1846 and published in 1884 by R. Weir, Comoes, New York. Chromolithograph. H. 6 7/8" x W. 8".

Lent by The Reverend and Mrs. DeWolf Perry, Princeton, Massachusetts.

Surely the most charming of Weir's published illustrations are those reproduced as Christmas cards, from two versions of his famous characterizations of Santa Claus. The first of these, (Fig. 20) inspired by the instant popularity of Clement C. Moore's poem, "A Visit from St. Nicholas," better known as "The Night before Christmas," in 1837, was painted that year to entertain his small sons Walter and Robert.[13] We may note here Bryant's comment to his wife, after visiting the Weir family a few months earlier, "He has four fine healthy children. Walter the eldest is one of the handsomest little boys I ever saw---and all are good tempered and well-behaved."[14]

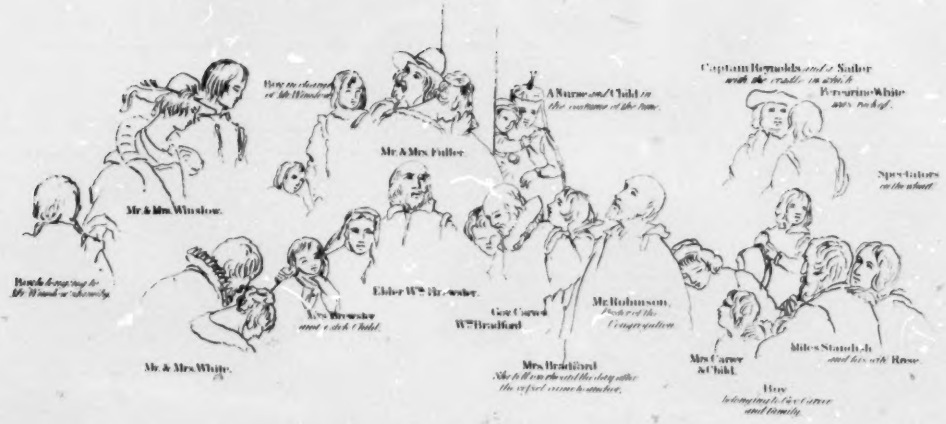

Fig. 21 Illustrated key to the principle figures in the *Embarkation of the Pilgrims from Delft-Haven* from a descriptive pamphlet published in 1843 by Piercy and Reed, Printers, 9 Spruce Street (New York). 13 pages. Illustration appears on page (7).

Special Collections Division, U.S. Military Academy Library

Of course, Weir's most famous picture, the one most often reproduced, is his huge canvas, *Embarkation of the Pilgrims from Delft Haven, In Holland,* installed in 1843 in the Rotunda of the Capitol as one of the eight National Paintings. This found a place during Weir's lifetime among his published illustrations, since he issued a descriptive brochure (Fig. 21) to accompany the painting's successive exhibitions in Boston, New York, and Philadelphia, as it made its way slowly to Washington.[15]

Ironically, it seems to have been Weir's worrisome personal problems which impelled him to produce so large a body of paintings, drawings, and illustrations. Although he directed the teaching of art in all its aspects at West Point from the time of his appointment in 1834 as Instructor of Drawing, he was not granted the title of "Professor" until a dozen years later. Meanwhile, he was raising a large family (eventually he had sixteen children by two wives!), on a very modest salary, and straining himself to produce whatever saleable pictures might augment his income. And he seems to have felt insecurity in his teaching position, under real or fancied disparagements by his professional military colleagues. He complained to his friends in New York of his working conditions and his penury, and asked their help. As late as 1856 he appealed to Bryant, influential editor of the *New York Evening Post* and friend of statesmen, for support against a recommendation to Congress by the Military Academy's Board of Visitors which, he feared, would reduce him to an inferior status. "They say," he wrote Bryant:

> There should be a more decided distinction between the *scientific* professors, and those of drawing, and of the *French and Spanish Languages*. At least this is the inference,. . . for, although the members of the academic board, have a rank by seniority of membership, . . . the object is now to make a differnece in the *pay*, by taking five hundred dollars from the latter, or by giving that amount in addition to the present pay of the former. Now, my dear Bryant, I do not pretend to teach the highest development of art, or assume to myself a single leaf from the bays of other masters, nor do I see on what ground this great distinction *mathematics* is based, I mean, *as it is taught in our schools*. It is but the A.B.C. of higher developments, ---a mere versification of truths already known; and does not justify the assumption of the glory of Newton or La Place, to dazzle with *their* splendour, the efforts, however laborious, in teaching the elements by which *genius attains* its distinction.[16]

This unhappy plaint, made while Weir was, he said, "feeble and nervous" after a long illness, was uncharacteristic of this man, who seems to have been held in affection and admiration by his fellow artists, colleagues, and pupils alike. His "laborious" efforts to teach "the elements by which *genius attains* its distinction" for which Weir craved recognition, were richly rewarded during his lifetime by the notable achievements of many of his former students in the seemingly disparate fields of art and war, for which he had taken such pains to prepare them. The award to him of the rank of colonel, upon his retirement in 1876, after 42 years of teaching, must surely have bolstered his pride. But the present fine exhibition of his art--the first ever to be assembled--on the centenary of his retirement, and at the scene of his greatest efforts, is surely the best tribute that could be paid to the genius of Robert Walter Weir.

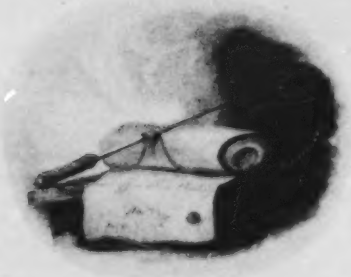

Illustration for "The Whip-Poor-Will" from *The Deserted Bride and Other Poems* by George Pope Morris. New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1843. Opposite page (142). H. 2¼" x W. 3".

Lent by the General Research and Humanities Division of The New York Public Library; Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations

FOOTNOTES

[1]Cadet Fine Arts Forum, *Robert W. Weir: Artist and Teacher of West Point* (West Point: Cadet Fine Arts Forum, 1976). Exhibition at the Military Academy, Cadet Activities Building, Eisenhower Hall from 22 October through 26 November 1976.

[2]Letter dated March 19, 1834, in *The Letters of William Cullen Bryant, Volume I, 1809-1836*, William Cullen Bryant II and Thomas G. Voss, eds., (New York: Fordham University Press, 1975), pp. 395-396.

[3]Manuscript letter, Bryant to W.A. Croffod, August 12, 1872, Wisconsin Historical Society; *National Academy of Design Exhibition Record 1826-1860* (New York: New-York Historical Society, 1943), II, 189.

[4]Ibid., pp. 189-191.

[5]George C. D. Odell, *Annals of the New York Stage, Volume III 182]-1834* (New York: Columbia University, 1928), p. 426.

[6]See Nelson F. Adkins, *Fitz-Greene Halleck, An Early Knickerbocker Wit and Poet* (New Haven: Yale University, 1930), pp. 235-240.

[7]*The Talisman for MDCCXXIX*, p. 254; *The Poetical Works of William Cullen Bryant*, Parke Godwin, ed. (New York: D. Appleton, 1883), pp. 347-348.

[8]Manuscript letter, Bryant to Frances Bryant, August 15, 1836, Goddart-Roslyn Collection, The New York Public Library.

[9]Irene Weir, *Robert W. Weir, Artist* (New York: Field-Doubleday, 1947), p. 49.

[10]Photograph of Weir's drawing for Bryant's "A Forest Hymn" included in this exhibition. See Catalog Number 10.

[11]See Lewis Leary, "Poe's ULALUME," *Explicator*, VI, No. 25 (February 1948).

[12]Manuscript letter, Bryant to Richard H. Dana, August 4, 1843, Massachusetts Historical Society.

[13]R.W.G. Vail, "Santa Claus Visits the Hudson," *The New-York Historical Society Quarterly, XXXV* (October 1951), 338, 341.

[14]Bryant to Frances Bryant, August 15, 1836.

[15]Kent Ahrens, "Robert Weir's Embarkation of the Pilgrims," *Capitol Studies*, I (Fall 1972), 62, 69.

[16]Manuscript letter, Weir to Bryant, August 12, 1856, Goddard-Roslyn Collection, The New York Public Library. For a discussion of Weir's similar appeals to Gulian Verplanck, see James T. Callow, *Kindred Spirits; Knickerbocker Writers and American Artists, 1807-1855* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1967), pp. 51-52.

Photograph of Robert W. Weir
Date unknown.

Courtesy of the Reverend and Mrs.
DeWolf Perry

Princeton, Massachusetts

ROBERT W. WEIR AS TEACHER

by

MICHAEL E. MOSS

While much attention has recently been given to Robert W. Weir's long and distinguished artistic career, little focus has been placed on his position as drawing professor at the Military Academy and the many cadet drawings done under his instruction.[1] For nearly forty-two years between 1834 and 1876, Weir taught hundreds of cadets the fundamentals of drawing. And while art instruction may not at first seem essential to a military education, at West Point the drawing course was a decidedly practical requirement for the young officers also being trained as engineers. The need for such instruction was recognized in 1803---early in the Academy's history when Congress authorized the "President of the United States to appoint...one teacher of drawing, to be attached to the Corps of Engineers, whose compensation shall not exceed the pay and emoluments of a captain in the Army."[2] As surveyors, map makers and even architects in some cases, the cadets graduating from West Point needed a firm background in drawing principles to accurately design their engineering plans.

The Academy is particularly fortunate to have a broad representation of cadet drawings---many of which reflect cadets with a marked artistic ability. The drawings are important as documents depicting cadet life and provide an even more important understanding of Weir's teaching methods. From the variety of subjects drawn, it is apparent that Weir encouraged students to sketch the landscape and environment around them. The small pen drawing *Le Cadet* (Fig. 22) by Cadet George H. Derby (USMA 1846), gives an intimate view of a barracks interior with a cadet in full dress studying. Pinned over the mantle is the drawing of a dancing ballerina which suggests that perhaps cadet drawings were used to decorate living quarters.

After graduating from West Point, Derby served with distinction in the Mexican War and was brevetted a first lieutenant due to his gallant conduct in the Battle of Cerro Gordo in which he was wounded. *Le Cadet* illustrates Derby's keen artistic interests which he pursued as a journalist. Derby thought of himself more as a writer of humorous fiction and while editor of the *San Diego Herald* during the 1850's, Derby published a highly popular book entitled *Phoenixiana: or Sketches and Burlesque*. Following the widespread acceptance of his book, Derby adopted the pen name of John Phoenix.[3]

Such delightful sketches as *Le Cadet* distinguish Weir's instruction at West Point from that of his many predecessors.

Prior to Weir's appointment in 1834, the drawing instructors seem to have relied heavily on teaching drawing through copying other works of art. This method of teaching was certainly not uncommon in European and American art academies. The principal founder of the American Academy of Fine Arts, Robert Livingston, suggested as early as 1801 that funds be raised for the purchase of statues and paintings to instruct American Academy students. His idea was adopted and five hundred dollars was allocated for this purpose in 1802. The Minister of the United States in Paris was then directed to purchase works of art or plaster casts of famous sculpture to facilitate art instruction in the United States.[4] While West Point did not own plaster casts of "famous sculpture" as did the American Academy, there were many engravings and lithographs of classical subjects in the drawing department which served as good models for cadets to copy.

Cadet Jefferson Davis (USMA 1828) copied the head of a Roman soldier (Fig. 23) during his training at West Point. While the source for Davis' Roman head is no longer at the Academy, it is likely that it was either an engraving or lithograph similar to the *Minerve* (Fig. 24) executed by A. Bourgeois. The *Minerve* is one of several prints which served as models for cadets to copy.[5]

Fig. 22 *Le Cadet* by George H. Derby (USMA 1846).
H. 8¼" x W. 6 3/4". Pen drawing.

West Point Museum Collections, United States Military Academy

Fig. 23

Fig. 24

In lieu of plaster casts , such prints were probably adequate instructional aids. It is important to recall that West Point was not training professional artists, but rather officers and engineers. However, the Davis drawing and the *Minerve* illustrate the Academy's desire to teach drawing using the traditional means of copying other works---a method known and practiced since the Renaissance.[6]

Weir's arrival at West Point also heralded a stability of leadership in the drawing department which already in its 31 year history had seen five different instructors come and go. The first instructor to teach drawing at West Point was Francis Desiré Masson, a French Artist, who remained at the Academy for five years. After his return to Paris, he was noted as a frequent exhibitor at the Salon of Paris between 1834 and 1850.[7] Masson was succeeded by another European of Swiss origin, Christian E. Zoeller. After Zoeller's appointment in 1808, he resigned in 1810 only to be reappointed to the same position in 1812. This two year interim seems to have been a period of disorganization as no drawing was taught during the intervening years. Weir's successor, Charles Larned, characterized Zoeller as a man of "limited education, who (seemed) to have been unequal to the requirements of his position."[8] Unequal or not, Zoeller remained at West Point until 1819 when another French artist, Thomas Gimbrede, succeeded him.

Fig. 23 Copy of a Roman soldier after the Antique by Jefferson Davis (USMA 1828). H. 19½" x W. 17 3/4". Pencil and Charcoal drawing.

West Point Museum Collections, United States Military Academy

Fig. 24 Head of *Minerve* printed by A. Bourgeois after a drawing by G. Reverdin. H. 21" x W. 13½". Published in London 1 April 1830 after an antique cameo per inscription. Lithograph.

The Department of Earth, Space and Graphic Sciences, United States Military Academy

Gimbrede came to the United States in 1802 and worked for New York and Philadelphia publishing firms for whom he presumably supplied engravings. In Dunlap's history of design in the United States, the author observes:

> "I have been told that (Gimbrede) was first known in New York as a dancing master. I first knew him as a miniature painter without employment. He then tried engraving, and did some work for publishers of books, and had a workshop of some extent and several apprentices. The prints he has published from drawings by himself show his utter want of skill or knowledge in the art, yet he was appointed teacher of drawing to the Military Academy at West Point. It must have required uncommon talents, or what is called cleverness, to teach that which he did not know: but by placing before the pupils approved models and by making himself acceptable, *he got on.*[9]

Dunlap's criticisms of Gimbrede, though harsh,clearly associate copy-work with the teaching method at West Point. And "....by placing before the pupils approved models...." one may assume that such prints as the *Minerve* served well.

When Gimbrede died on Christmas Day of 1832, the Academy asked the English artist, Charles A. Leslie to fill the vacancy. Leslie accepted the appointment but returned to England within the year leaving the drawing teacher's position empty once again.

It is not clear why Leslie returned to England although the "rigid environment" of the Military Academy in a country "destitute of art" may have been strong contributing factors in his decision.[10] Regardless of his motives, in 1834 Robert Weir succeeded this long line of drawing instructors at West Point and would not depart for more than forty years.

Prior to Weir's appointment, he had studied art in Italy in the mid-1820's under another American abroad, Horatio Greenough---famous for his seated sculpture of George Washington (Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.). During his stay in Rome, Weir developed his own talent for copying other works of art. His watercolor copy of *Justice* by the Renaissance artist Guilio Romano, in the Vatican, reflects his understanding of the Roman sense of color.[11] This watercolor links Weir philosophically to his contemporaries who espoused the

Fig. 25 Study of Entwined Trees by Seth Eastman (USMA 1829). H. 4 3/4" x W. 9¼". Watercolor study.
West Point Museum Collections, United States Military Academy

virtues of learning to draw through copying the "old masters". Even though Weir did not use this method as his primary means of instructing cadets, he did provide many delightful watercolors by the English artist Thomas Allom (1804-1872) which are still in the Academy's collection.

Cadet Samuel G. French (USMA 1843) is the link between Allom's watercolors and Weir's instruction as he copied Allom's *Baths at Constantinople* with great accuracy. While both original and copy are included in this exhibition, Allom's other drawings at the Academy; *Interior View of Manchester Cathedral* and *The Custom House, Liverpool*, must have been of equal importance to Weir's drawing instruction. As architectural drawings, Allom's models would have been most important not only for the accuracy of of detail but to an artist such as Weir, they represent works of quality.

During Weir's early years at the Academy it was his fortune to have the recently graduated cadet, Seth Eastman (USMA 1829) as an assistant. To some degree the two artists must have been kindred spirits as Eastman's studies of Nature reflect Weir's interest in the landscape. Eastman's watercolor study of entwined trees (Fig. 25) provides additional evidence suggesting that cadets were encouraged to draw from the surrounding landscape.[12]

Eastman assisted Weir between 1834 and 1840 as an instructor. The Academy had already recognized his abilities and asked that he instruct the drawing course in the interim between Leslie's departure and Weir's arrival.

By 1837, Weir had secured eight-hundred dollars from Congress "for a painting room for the professor of drawing."[13] And it is from this maneuver that Weir successfully managed to establish exhibitions for his students' work. When the Military Academy was reviewed by the Board of Visitors in 1839, their flattering report must certainly have reaffirmed Weir's sense of accomplishment and purpose at West Point. In their report they stated:

> A knowledge of the principles and skill in the art of drawing, is an acquisition important in its relation to every branch of science, and especially those connected with the duties of an Officer of the Army. In this department some improvements have been made within the last year, which appear to be judicious, and cannot fail to be highly advantageous to the students.
>
> . . .
>
> The room at present appropriated to the instruction in drawing, possesses many advantages over the one formerly used for the purpose, in regard to size, the distribution of light, and other conveniences.
>
> We were much gratified in perceiving that a commodious room, 75 by 22 feet, is now fitting up for the exhibition of drawings and paintings of those Cadets who have distinguished themselves in this department; and that excellent illustrations of light, shade, and coloring, are prepared to be placed in the pannels (sic) of this room for the instruction of the student. The latter is the result of the laudable industry of the present professor executed during his leisure hours. [14]

While exhibition records from this period do not exist, it is likely that Weir's exhibits consisted for the most part of sketches by cadets who had distinguished themselves in the department as well as drawings from the department's own collection.

One of these distinguished cadets was Truman Seymour (USMA 1846) who later married Weir's eldest daughter Louisa and followed in Eastman's steps by assisting Weir as an instructor between 1850 and 1853.[15]

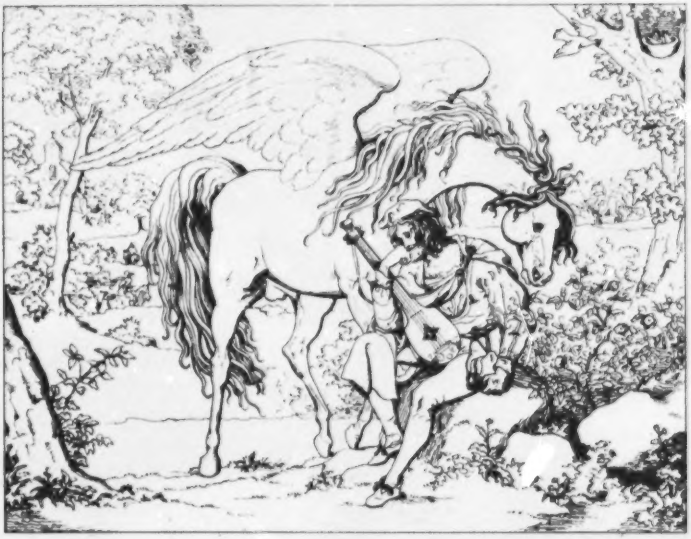

Fig. 26 *Musician with Pegasus* by Truman Seymour (USMA 1846). H. 8" x W. 10¼". Pen drawing.

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The small pen drawing by Seymour (Fig. 26) of a musician with Pegasus reflects the artist's interest in this popular mythological subject of the nineteenth century. In style, Seymour's concept of Nature is very much akin to that of the English eighteenth century watercolorists. Both treat the landscape and particularly the foliage, with an amoebic sense of outline. In Seymour's work this fluid style results in a very light and almost abbreviated definition of the countryside.

Another cadet, who worked very much in the style of the English watercolorists was John Daniel Kurtz (USMA 1842). His pen drawing of a man giving flowers to a young woman (Fig. 27) reflects a strong interest in simplifying Nature to lines with just the slightest hint of modeling. Kurtz became the assistant engineer in charge of fortifications at Charleston Harbor after graduating from West Point. He held this post from 1842 until 1851 when he moved to Washington, D.C. in another engineering capacity. Certainly as an

Fig. 27 *Man Giving Flowers to a Young Woman* by John Daniel Kurtz (USMA 1842). H. 7¼" x W. 9½". Pen drawing.

The Department of Earth, Space and Graphic Sciences, United States Military Academy

engineer in charge of architectural fortifications, Kurtz's drawing background must have been a great help.

Cadet copy after the Antique was not entirely abandoned during Weir's tenure at West Point. In 1838, the famous Civil War General, William Tecumseh Sherman (USMA 1840) drew the forceful subject of a soldier slaying a centaur.[16] Compositionally, this work is more complex than any of the copies executed prior to Weir's appointment. The pyramidal arrangement of the soldier and centaur command an artistic understanding of perspective, shading and modeling which Sherman aptly incorporated into the drawing.

Fig. 28 Watercolor of Indians and Trader by Ulysses S. Grant (USMA 1843). H. 10½" x W. 14½". Watercolor.

West Point Museum Collections, United States Military Academy

Another famous general and later President of the United States, Ulysses S. Grant (USMA 1843), demonstrated keen artistic abilities in his cadet drawings at the Academy.

His watercolor of two Indians and a trader (Fig. 28) done in 1841, shows an artistic inclination and talent of a man so well known for other accomplishments in the military and national affairs of the United States. The watercolor is a particularly successful compositional arrangement of the seated trader, smoking Indian and squaw nursing a child. Added to these figures are many small implements of trade such as blankets, knives, rifles and the delightful dog of dubious breed who helps focus the viewer's attention to the middle of the composition.

Weir's most famous student was James Abbott McNeill Whistler. This American expatriate was a cadet at the Academy between 1851 and 1854 when he was forced to leave due to poor grades in chemistry and an over-abundance of demerits. The artist's principal biographers quote Whistler as saying, "Had silicon been a gas, I would have been a major general."[17]

In actuality, Whistler was ~~temperamentally~~ not suited to the rigors of a military education or the discipline of an officer's life. He had come to West Point, following in his father's footsteps, George Washington Whistler (USMA 1819), who as an engineer, had helped the Russians build their transcontinental railroad. Whistler's uncle, William Gibbs McNeill, had also graduated from the Academy in 1817. Even though the family wishes may have been instrumental in depositing Whistler at West Point, he seems to have had little interest in seeing that he stayed. It was only in his drawing class that he excelled, but this was, of course, not enough to keep him at the Academy.

Pennell reports the following event during Whistler's course with Weir:

> In the art class one day, while Whistler was busy over an India ink drawing of a French peasant girl, Weir walked as usual, from desk to desk, examining the pupils' work. After looking over Whistler's shoulder he stepped back to his own desk filled his brush with India ink...and approached Whistler with a view of correcting some of the lines in the latter's drawing. When Whistler saw him coming, he raised his hands as if to ward off the strokes of his brush and called out, "Oh don't sir, don't! You'll spoil it!"[18]

Weir reportedly did nothing to the drawing and left it uncorrected.

Whistler's *On Post Duty at West Point: An Encampment* (Fig. 29) is a delightful drawing from his cadet days which humorously contrasts the disciplined and trained company of soldiers with that of the reclining sentry in the foreground. One is tempted to see the artist in the main figure as he perhaps viewed himself as a cadet.

Whistler's illustration for the "Song of the Graduates" of 1852 (Fig. 30) reflects even further his ability to express himself as an artist. The elegant treatment of the two cadets is a feature of Whistler's style which would appear again and again in his later work.

Fig. 30 Cover to "Song of the Graduates", 1852, Sheet music cover. Published in New York by Firth, Pond & Co. H. 11" x W. 9". Lithograph.

West Point Museum Collections, United States Military Academy

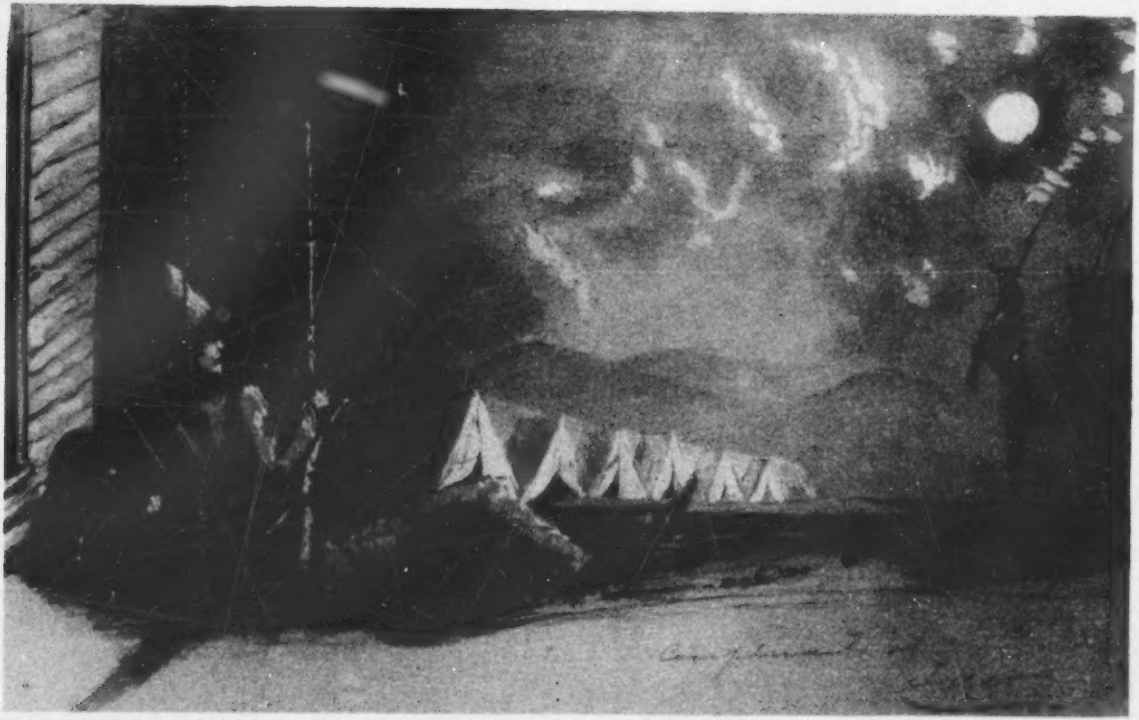

Fig. 29 *On Post Duty at West Point: An Encampment* by James Abbott McNeill Whistler (USMA 1855).
H. 5 7/8" x W. 9¼". Gouache and ink drawing. *Special Collections Division, U.S. Military Academy Library*

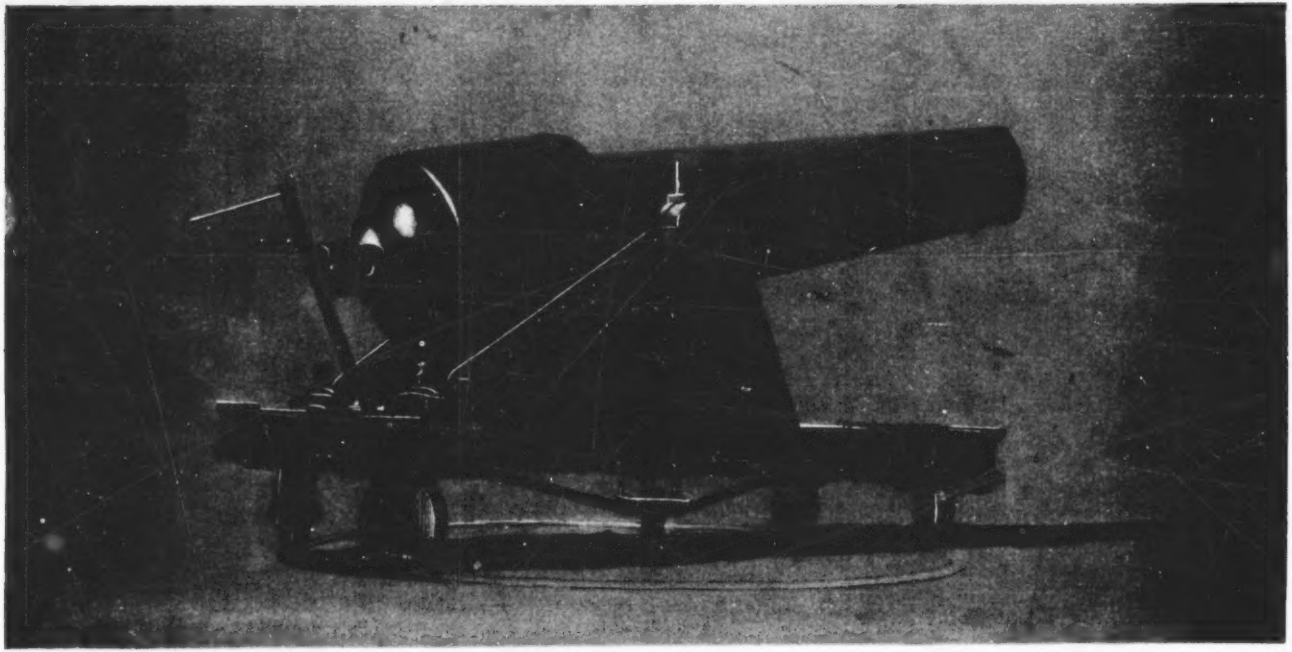

Fig. 31 *Fortifications Cannon* by Cadet Charles William Whipple (USMA 1868). H. 10 3/4" x W. 17". Watercolor. *The Department of Earth, Space and Graphic Sciences, United States Military Academy*

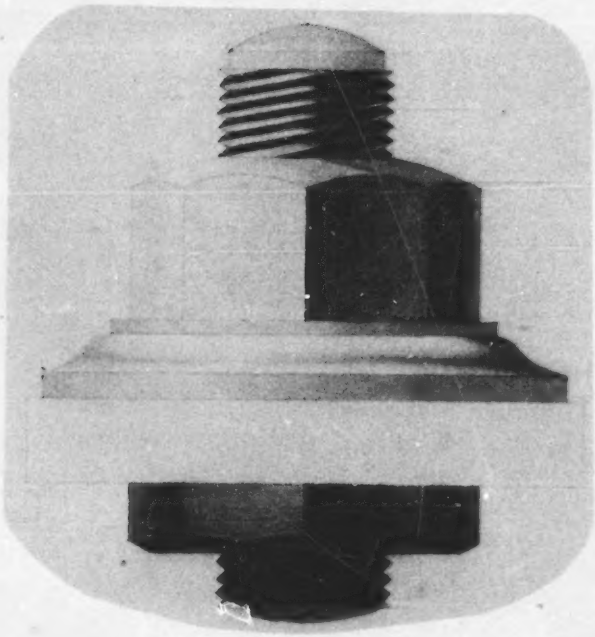

Fig. 32 *Mechanical drawing of a nut and bolt* by Cadet Alexander DuBois Schenck (USMA 1867). H. 11¼" x W. 11¼". Watercolor.

The Department of Earth, Space, and Graphic Sciences, United States Military Academy

Whistler had no malice toward the Academy and on the title page of a book he gave to West Point later in his life, he wrote, "From an old cadet whose pride it is to remember his West Point days."[19]

During the 1860s, two cadets, Charles William Whipple (USMA 186A), and Alexander DuBois Schenck (USMA 1867), produced very accomplished technical drawings which emphasize the success and ultimate goal of the course in drawing at West Point. Whipple's drawing of a *Fortifications Cannon* (Fig. 31) is, in its detail and modeling a very apt work. While its emphasis is technical, the watercolor displays a highly developed understanding of drawing fundamentals.

Schenck's depiction of a bolt (Fig. 32) and his line drawing of a *Soldier* (Fig. 33) demonstrate the range of drawings executed by cadets. Schenck's mechanical sketch of the nut and bolt are accurate in design, and like Whipple's *Fortifications Cannon*, reflect the cadet's visual acuity. The infantryman is drawn in an imaginary dress uniform and Schenck may have used a composite of European uniforms to create this sketch. It also illustrates the artist's ability to work with the pen---a drawing medium essential to engineering and topographical survey work.

It is to Weir's credit that such students as Whipple and Schenck were equipped with the drawing skills so integral to their careers as engineers. The Whistlers, Seymours and Eastmans would have become professional artists in any case, but it is a special tribute to Weir's talent as a teacher that he introduced hundreds of cadets to the fine arts, and disciplined their hands to draw what they could see.

Fig. 33 *Soldier* by Cadet Alexander DuBois Schenck (USMA 1867). H. 12 3/4" x W. 9½". Pen drawing.

West Point Museum Collections, United States Military Academy

FOOTNOTES

[1]The current exhibition of Robert Weir's paintings and drawings at the Military Academy is the first major reappraisal of the artist since his death in 1889. Cadet Fine Arts Forum , *Robert W. Weir: Artist and Teacher of West Point* (West Point: Cadet Fine Arts Forum, 1976).

[2]Act of 28 February 1803 *U.S. Statutes at Large*, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1803), II, 206. Chapter XIII, Section 2. (Seventh Congress).

[3]For further information on Derby's career see Kenneth Rapp and Thelma Bedell, "Captain George Derby alias John Phoenix," *Assembly*, 20 (Winter 1962), 4-6. Published by the Association of Graduates, United States Military Academy.

[4]See Theodore Sizer's history of the American Academy in Mary Bartlett Cowdrey, *American Academy of Fine Arts and American Art-Union: 1816-1852*, (New York: The New-York Historical Society, 1953), I, 8-10.

[5]In pencil, the *Minerve* has been lined off into squares. This indicates that the lithograph was intended to be copied as such gridding techniques were often used by artists to transfer drawings to larger canvases. Weir himself gridded several of his drawings which were later used as reference for the larger oil version of the same subject. Particularly see his drawings for *Peace* in the lunette of the Old Cadet Chapel at West Point and his drawing of *Columbus before the Council at Salamonca*.

[6]For a critical appraisal of the growth of the American Art Academy and its historical roots, see Lois Marie Fink and Joshua C. Taylor, *Academy: The Academic Tradition in American Art*, (Washington, D.C.: The National Collection of Fine Arts, 1975).

[7]Emmanuel Bénézit, *Dictionnaire Critique Documentaire des Peintres, Sculpteurs, Dessinateurs et Graveurs, etc.*, (Saint-Ouen: Gaston Maillet et Cie., 1966), *Troisieme Edition*, V, 829.

[9]*Annual Report of the Superintendent of the United States Military Academy,* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1896), Section E, p. 24.

[9]William Dunlap, *A History of the Rise and Progress of the Arts of Design in the United States* (Boston: C.E. Goodspeed & Co., 1918), III, 20.

[10]*Annual Report of the Superintendent.....*, p. 24.

[11]Weir's watercolor of *Justice* illustrated in Cadet Fine Arts Forum, *Robert W. Weir: Artist and Teacher of West Point* (West Point: Cadet Fine Arts Forum, 1976).

[12]This particular drawing by Eastman is one of a series of Nature and architectural watercolor studies in the West Point Museum Collections. They are not dated.

[13]Act of 2 March 1837 *U.S. Statutes at Large,* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1837), V, 152. Chapter XVIII, Section II.

[14]*Annual Report of the Board of Visitors of the United States Military Academy, West Point, New York, June 20, 1839,* (Washington, D.C. : A.B. Claxton & Co., 1839), p. 5.

[15]For a critical analysis of Seymour's artistic career, see Kent Ahrens, *Water Color and Drawings by Brevet Major General Truman Seymour USMA 1846,* (West Point: United States Military Academy, 1974), with introduction by Earle Whitmore.

[16]This cadet copy is signed in pencil, lower right, May 1, 1838 and is in the West Point Museum Collections.

[17]Elizabeth Robins Pennell and Joseph Pennell, *The Life of James McNeill Whistler* (London: William Heinemann, 1908), I, 33.

[18]Pennell, *Life of James McNeill Whistler,* I, 31.

[19]Pennell, *Life of James McNeill Whistler,* I, 38.

Photograph of Robert W. Weir and his second wife
Susan Bayard Weir c. 1876-1880

Courtesy of the Reverend and Mrs. DeWolf Perry
Princeton, Massachusetts

THE POETRY OF ROBERT W. WEIR

by

CAPTAIN JOSEPH T. COX

Interviewed by a reporter from the New York *Evening Post* in 1877, Robert W. Weir offered his definition of the meaning of art:

> Art is man's interpretation of beauty, expressed not only in form and color, but in every truth which can be represented or suggested by poetic words or by pictorial skill. It is chiselled, colored, or written index of the mind; and for this reason, in its purity, in the integrity of its purpose, it is a strong incentive to good. To study the language which all visible objects speak, and by this means to bring out the higher relations which they bear to human thought and life, is the poetry of art.[1]

Weir's definition of art begins with a hint of aestheticism, "art for art's sake," but there is a moral qualification to Weir's definition that goes beyond an implied Keatsean belief that:

> "Beauty is truth, truth beauty,"--that is all
> Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.

In that Weir's artist records the "higher relationship" of "all visible objects," he, like Emerson's Poet, "stands among partial men for the complete man."[2] Both Weir and Emerson see the artist as "interpreter," a sort of "middleman" between the physical object and God. Thus, the artist's work and the audience's appreciation of his work are "incentives to good."

This concept of art helps us understand and appreciate Robert Weir's poetry. Although the poems would not cause a ripple in the stream of literary criticism, they do provide an "index of the mind," a glimpse of the man who was Robert W. Weir. In his painting, he sought transparency and depth and shunned opacity.[3] Likewise in his poetry, there is a partial record of a faith in God's presence in the world that enabled Weir to penetrate the opacity of life's mysteries.

Weir's poems are lyrics, brief records of the poet's emotions, written not for a preconceived audience but composed to satisfy a personal need for expression. Structurally, they are

not original, being either rhymed Iambic Pentameter or variations of Poulter's Measure, a combination of Iambic Trimeter and Iambic Tetrameter found in the verse patterns of standard American hymns. In fact, one of his poems, *The Round of the Waters*, dated 1864, was set to music and published two years later by William A. Pond Inc. of New York. It is, perhaps, the only one of Weir's poems to achieve wide publication status.[4] 1834 marks the earliest dated poem we have; the majority being undated but most likely written during Weir's 42-year tenure at West Point, from 1834-1876.

Weir's earliest and one of his latest dated poems offer an interesting comparison. Both are nature poems. The 1834 poem is perhaps a reflection of Weir's first winter on the banks of the icy Hudson at West Point. In the poem he compares a winter morning viewed from his front door to a summer morning and sees "Nature bounteour still" in the frozen scene before him. Two years before the publication of "Nature", Weir is anticipating Emerson's belief that man is as much touched by the graces of the winter scenery as by the genial influences of summer.[5] Weir perceives "higher relations" in the frozen beauty before him; his fertile spirit needed no "growing" season.

While from my door I view the opening day
'Tis vain to check my soul's responsive lay
The rising sun sends forth his glories bright,
He floods the hills, and tips the clouds with light;
The glittering trees his bright effulgence show,
As streams with radiant light the virgin snow.
How different now the scene!--In summer's dawn
When purple hues foretell the coming morn
And bars of brilliant gold bedeck the sky,
As in their course the steeds of Phoebus fly;
The lowland mist in fleecy clouds ascends
Its broken vail across the hills extends;
While on the meads, bedeck'd with many a hue
Still lies the breath of night--the pearly dew.

Once more to winter turn, and view the scene,
No dancing brook, no mosses soft and green
Invite the eye.--Yet, Nature bounteous still,
Spreads forth her fairy work o'er vale and hill;
The leafless trees, now glit'ring in our sight
In frosted silver dress'd--the labour of a night,
The strug'ling brook whose pulses seem to chase
Each after each beneath its crystal case,
And where the rocks retard its downward way
Fantastic shapes are formed of frozen spray.
Above, the Hemlock bends his branches low
Laden with icy gems, and purest snow
And farther off, the Silver Pine is seen
With Cedars old, that make the forest green,
While on the ground is cast a robe of white
Reflecting back the sun's redundant light.

Cold must he be who can refuse his song
In praise of Winter as she trips along.

The later poem, *The Round of the Waters*, published in 1864 traces the progress of a drop of rain from cloud, to mountain stream, to river, to ocean, to cloud. As in the 1834 poem, the controlling sentiment is "all Thy works praise Thee, O Lord." And it is no accident that an Emersonian circle is the controlling image; Weir, too, perceived that grand symmetry that is God's world.

The Round of the Waters

"All Thy works praise Thee, O Lord.
All Thy works praise Thee, O Lord.
All Thy works priase Thee, O Lord."

Up, up on the mountains, high up near the sky,
Where the earth gathers moisture from clouds passing by;
Where the first drops of rain patter down full of glee,
As they join hand in hand on their way to the sea.

While the rills, like young children, go prattling along,
Full of life, full of joy, full of motion and song;
And swelling the brooks, with glad voices they raise,
To Him who made all things, their tribute of praise.

Then, as they dance onward, half hidden in spray,
Like bands of young nymphs dress'd in bridal array,
With shouts of wild laughter they leap the deep linn,
Where the broad flowing river at once takes them in.

Now calm their rude mirth as they matronly glide,
Bearing onward rich freight to the blue briny tide;
Where the mist of the mountains once more joins the sea
With its incense, O Lord, ever heaving to Thee.

Weir's faith in natural regeneration had implications beyond an amateur interest in natural science. During periods of great personal tragedy, Weir wrote poems that expressed deep religious faith, a devout belief that there was a spiritual equivalent to the observable natural phenomena of regeneration. In 1845, Weir's first wife, Louisa, and two daughters, Mary and Alice, died. The following poem expresses the sorrow and the compensation.

THE SOUND OF THE WATERS
"ALL THY WORKS PRAISE THEE, O LORD"
DEDICATED TO MRS. R.W. WEIR
Music by
J. G. BARNARD.
Harmonized by the
REV. WM. STAUNTON, D.D.
NEW YORK,
Published by Wm A. POND & CO. 547 Broadway.

Fig. 34 Cover illustration for sheet music "All Thy Works Praise Thee, O Lord". Measurements of vignette H. 6 3/4" x W. 8¼". Chromolithograph.

Special Collections Division, U.S. Military Academy Library

Dear children! ye are absent now
Your birth-room knows you not.
Your empty crib, and cradle low,
Hallow this cherished spot.
The silent room to us is dear,
It seemeth that ye still are here.

In Christ ye all were born anew,
And sign'd with holy cross:
Your gentle forms He then withdrew
And now we mourn our loss.
To you ye lov'd ones this is gain,
To us, it seemeth nought but pain.

In the damp earth we laid them low
With this assurance given.
Your suff'ring ones are happy now
They are with Christ in heaven.
With angels blest their spirits soar
And pain and grief shall know no more.

Dear Lord, on us Thy Spirit be,
To live as pure as they,
That we, with them, may worship Thee,
For ever and for aye.
Thy mercy and They love adore
Thy praises sing forevermore.

Because Weir wrote poetry for himself and no preconceived audience, it is not surprising that familial affection was a theme. Weir was a man of sentiment, but it was not cheap sentiment. He loved his family and his friends, and his poetry reflects a heart that was sincere and sympathetic.[6] The poem "The Stepdaughter" is perhaps about an "adopted" daughter of whom we have no record. Real or imagined, the little girl who was the object of the poem was loved by a gentle man.

THE STEP DAUGHTER

She is not mine, and to my heart
Perhaps she is less dear
Than those who of my life are part--
This is the sin I fear;
And ever in the dread to err,
By loving those the best,
More gentle have I been to her,
Perhaps, than all the rest.

Has any little fault occurred,
That may rebuke demand,
Ere I can speak a hasty word,
Or life a chiding hand,
An angel's face comes flitting by
With look so sad and mild--
A voice floats softly from the sky--
"Wouldst harm my orphan child?"
No--witness thou and all above,
I'll cherish her as mine,
Or may I lose her father's love,
A love that once was thine!

Weir's affection for fellow West Point Professors is reflected in a poem addressed to Jacob Whitman Bailey, West Point Class of 1832 and Professor of Chemistry. Bailey was a talented scientist and "a man of fine literary feeling,"[7] an observer of nature who appreciated the spiritual implications of natural phenomenon. Weir once called nature "the mother of all good" and had little patience with artists who turned their backs on nature and were content to copy the old masters only. This copying of nature "at two or three removes. . . would reduce art to the lowest degredation and servility."[8] Weir admired Bailey, a spiritually sensitive observer of nature, and recorded his admiration in a poem quickly scribbled during the final examination of graduating cadets.

Dear Bailey, you are rich indeed,
Your wealth lies all around.
Your library--superbly vast,
With the blue heav'n is bound.
Each tiny leaf presents a page,
Transmitted from remotest age,
Of teeming thought to thee,
And in the hidden lap of earth,
The mystery of seedling birth--
The secret germ you see,
And Flora for whose charms we sue,
She freely lifts her veil for you.

By his own standards, Weir, too, was "wealthy." His tastes and ambitions were temperate; his goals in life simple. In his poem, "Wishes" Weir described a lifestyle similar to the one he lived at West Point.

WISHES

Now give me but a cat that's good
In some great town's neighborhood:
A garden, where the winds may play
Fresh from the blue hills far away,

And wanton with such trees as bear
Their loads of green through all the year,
Laurel, and dusky juniper:
So may some friends, whose social talk
I love, there take their evening walk
And spend a frequent holiday.

And may I own a quiet room,
Where the morning sun may come,
Stored with books of poesy,
Tale, science, old morality,
Fable, and divine history
Ranged in separate cases sound,
Each with living marble crowned;

And one I'd have, whose heaving breast
Should rock me nightly to my rest,
By holy chains bound fast to me,
Faster by Love's sweet sorcery.

She should be a woman who
(Graceful without much endeavour)
Could praise or excuse all I do,
And love me ever.

I'd have her thoughts fair, and her skin
White as the white soul within;
And her fringed eyes of darkest blue,
Which the great soul looketh through,
Like heaven's own gates cerulean.

Weir's poems describe his love of nature, friends, learning, and family. He loved the variety of the world around him, and devoted his life to the pursuit of art, not for art's sake, but for the advancement of man, the purification of the human spirit. Weir once wrote "The necessity for every reasonable effort to promote the advancement and culture of the Fine arts is evident from their refining influence: the harmony of sounds, and the beauty of visible art produces mysterious effects on our senses, elevating our thoughts and, when not prostituted by vitiated taste, making us purer and better members of society; as the grosser appetites, like weeds are kept down, and the better nature which God has given to all, has some inducement for growth and development."[9] Elevated by thought and deed, Robert W. Weir deserves our attention, and his poetry, structurally flawed as it is, remains a morally inspiring record of a decent and noble mind.

FOOTNOTES

[1]G.W. Sheldon, *American Painters with 83 Examples of Their Work Engraved on Wood* (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1879), p. 163.

[2]"The breadth of the problem is great, for the poet is representative. He stands among partial men for the complete man, and apprises us not of his wealth, but of the common wealth. The young man reveres men of genius, because, to speak truly, they are more himself than he is. They receive of the soul as he also receives, but they more. Nature enhances her beauty, to the eye of loving men, from their belief that the poet is beholding her shows at the same time. He is isolated among his contemporaries by truth and by his art, but with this consolation in his pursuits, that they will draw all men sooner or later. For all men live by truth and stand in need of expression. In love, in art, in avarice, in politics, in labor, in games, we study to utter our painful secret. The man is only half himself, the other half is his expression." Ralph Waldo Emmerson, "The Poet" in *The American Tradition in Literature*, ed. Sculley Bradley et al., 4th ed. (Grosset & Dunlap, 1974), I, 1149.

[3]William H. Gerdts, "Robert Weir, Artist and Teacher of West Point" *Robert W. Weir: Artist and Teacher of West Point* (West Point: Cadet Fine Arts Forum, 1976).

[4]Since the writing of this article, Weir poems have been found formally printed on plates that would suggest publication. If and where they were published is still unknown.

[5]Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Nature," p. 1046.

[6]James T. Callow reports that William Cullen Bryant regarded Weir as "a man of great simplicity . . . and depth of feeling." James T. Callow, "Robert W. Weir and The Sketch Club" *Robert W. Weir: Artist and Teacher of West Point* (West Point: Cadet Fine Arts Forum, 1976).

[7]John Ferguson Weir, "The Recollections of John Ferguson Weir" ed. Theodore Sizer, *The New York Historical Society Quarterly*, 41 (April 1957), 124.

[8]William Dunlap, *A History of the Rise and Progress of the Arts of Design in the United States* (Boston: Goodspeed, 1918), III, 191.

[9]Letter by Weir to a Mr. Kemble, dated 16 December 1873, copy in the Archives of American Art.

CATALOG OF THE EXHIBITION

1. *Marginal Illustration for Love's Labour's Lost from Shakespeare's Plays: With His Life.* Ed. Gulian C. Verplanck. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1847. II.

   Special Collections Division, U.S. Military Academy Library

2. *Washington's Headquarters at Newburgh* from *The New-York Mirror, XII,* Number 26, 27 December 1834, Opposite page (201). H. 6" x W. 9". Steel engraving by James Smillie after Weir.

   Lent by the Newburgh Free Library Newburgh, New York

3. *Lunatic Asylum, New York* from *The New-York Mirror, XI,* 1 February 1834, Opposite Page 241. H. 6 1/8" x W. 9". Steel engraving by James Smillie

   Lent by the Newburgh Free Library Newburgh, New York

4. Title page vignette for *The New-York Mirror.* Repeated in succeeding volumes from 1831. H. 4¼" x W. 6". Engraved by A.B. Durand.

   Lent by the Putnam County Historical Society Cold Spring, New York

5. *The Presidents of the United States: from Original and Accurate Portraits* from *The New-York Mirror, XII,* 9 August 1834, Opposite Page (41). Engraved by J.W. Casilear. H. 10¼"x W. 8¼".

   Lent by the Putnam County Historical Society Cold Spring, New York

6. *Landing of Hendrick Hudson* from *The New-York Mirror, XV,* 23 December 1837, p. (201). H. 2 3/4" x W. 5". Engraving on wood. Engraver not listed.

   Lent by the Putnam County Historical Society Cold Spring, New York

7. *View of the Hudson Highlands from West Point* from *The New-York Mirror, XIII,* 14 May 1836, Opposite page (361). H. 6¼" x W. 9". Steel engraving by James Smillie.

Lent by the Newburgh Free Library Newburgh, New York

8. *North Battery foot of Hubert Street, New York* from *The New-York Mirror, XI,* 6 July 1833, Opposite page (1). H. 6 1/8" x W. 9". Steel engraving by James Smillie.

Lent by the Putnam County Historical Society Cold Spring, New York

9. *Sa-Go-Ye-Wat-Ha (portrait of Red Jacket)* from *The Life and Times of SA-GO-YE-WAT-HA or Red Jacket* by William L. Stone. New York: Wiley & Putnam, 1841. Facing Title Page. H. 5¼"x W 3½". Engraved by H. Danforth after Weir's portrait.

Special Collections Division, U.S. Military Academy Library

10. Photograph illustrating Weir's drawing for Bryant's "A Forest Hymn". Original drawing in the Goddard-Roslyn Collection, The New York Public Library.

Lent by William Cullen Bryant, II Garrison, New York

11. *Cro' Nest, From Above West Point, on the Hudson River* from *The Culprit Fay and other Poems by Joseph Rodman Drake.* New York: George Dearborn, 1835. Title vignette. H. 2 3/4" x W. 3 7/8". Engraved by James Smillie after Weir.

Lent by the General Research and Humanities Division of The New York Public Library Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations

12. *The Serenade from Poems by George Pope Morris.* New York: Charles Scribner, 1853. Opposite page 177. H. 4 3/4" x W. 3 3/8". Engraved by Alfred Jones after Weir.

Lent by the General Research and Humanities Division of The New York Public Library; Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations.

13. *"...enter this wild wood, / And view the haunts of Nature."* from *Poems by William Cullen Bryant*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1836. Title vignette. H. 2¼" x W. 3". Engraved by T.H. Cushman after Weir.

Lent by William Cullen Bryant, II
Garrison, New York

14. Title vignette for "The Whip-Poor-Will" from *The Deserted Bride and Other Poems by George Pope Morris*. New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1843. H. 2" x W. 2 5/8".

Lent by the General Research and Humanities Division of The New York Public Library Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations

15. Cover illustration for sheet music "Sweet and Low". The *Cradle Song* from Tennyson's "Princess". H. 7¼" x W. 9". Chromolithograph.

Special Collections Division, U.S. Military Academy Library

16. Cover illustration for sheet music "All Thy Works Praise Thee, O Lord". H. 6 3/4" x W. 8¼". Chromolithograph.

Special Collections Division, U.S. Military Academy Library

17. Cover illustration for sheet music "The Splendor Falls on Castle Walls". The *Echo Song* from Tennyson's "Princess". H. 6¼" x W. 9¼". Chromolithograph.

Special Collections Division, U.S. Military Academy Library

18. *Evening, A Scene in the Highlands, N.Y.* engraved for *The New-York Mirror*. H. 8 1/8" x 6 5/8". Tinted lithograph.

Lent by William Cullen Bryant, II
Garrison, New York

19. *Robert Sands* from *The Writings of Robert Sands in Prose and Verse*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1834. Vol. I, Opposite title page. H. 4¼" x W. 3 3/4". Engraved by Asher B. Durand.

Lent by William Cullen Bryant, II
Garrison, New York

20. Christmas Card inspired by Clement C. Moore's "A Visit from St. Nicholas". Painted by Weir in 1846 and published as a card in 1884 by R. Weir, Comoes, New York. Chromolithograph. H. 6 7/8" x W. 8".

Lent by the Reverend and Mrs. DeWolf Perry Princeton, Massachusetts

21. Illustrated key to the principle figures in Weir's *Embarkation of the Pilgrims from Delft-Haven* from a descriptive pamphlet published in 1843 by Piercy and Reed, Printers, 9 Spruce Street (New York). 13 pages.

Special Collections Division, U.S. Military Academy Library

22. Drawing for *Shakespeare's Plays*,Title page of "Hamlet". New York: H.W. Hewet, 1844. H. 8" x W. 5½". Pen drawing. Signed lower left, Robt. W. Weir. This drawing was probably executed for the Verplanck edition of Shakespeare's plays, published in 1847.

Special Collections Division, U.S. Military Academy Library

23. Pastoral scene by T.S. Cooper. Executed in 1838 as a series of animal studies, and published in portfolio form. H. 12" x W. 17½". Tinted lithograph. This set of prints is still at the Academy and probably was used by Weir for cadet instruction.

The Department of Earth, Space and Graphic Sciences, United States Military Academy

24. *Baths at Constantinople* by Thomas Allom. H. 7 7/8" x W. 11 3/4". Watercolor.

The Department of Earth, Space and Graphic Sciences, United States Military Academy

25. Copy of Thomas Allom's *Baths at Constantinople* by Cadet Samuel G. French (USMA 1843). H. 7 7/8" x W. 12". Watercolor.

The Department of Earth, Space and Graphic Sciences, United States Military Academy

26. *The Custom House, Liverpool* by Thomas Allom. H. 4 7/8" x W. 7¼". Pencil with watercolor.

The Department of Earth, Space and Graphic Sciences, United States Military Academy

27. *Old Church, Manchester* by Thomas Allom. H. 6 3/8" x. W. 4 1/8". Pencil with watercolor.

The Department of Earth, Space and Graphic Sciences, United States Military Academy

28. *Oakhampton Castle, Devonshire* by Thomas Allom. H. 3 3/4" x W. 6". Pen and watercolor.

The Department of Earth, Space and Graphic Sciences, United States Military Academy

29. *Unknown castle scene* by J. Varley. H. 5 1/8" x 8 7/8". Watercolor.

The Department of Earth, Space and Graphic Sciences, United States Military Academy

30. *Bambourough Castle* by J. Varley. H. 6 1/8" x W. 8 7/8". Watercolor.

The Department of Earth, Space and Graphic Sciences, United States Military Academy

31. *Le Cadet* by Cadet George H. Derby (USMA 1846). H. 8½" x W. 6 3/4". Pen drawing.

West Point Museum Collections, United States Military Academy

32. Head of *Minerve* printed by A. Bourgeois after a drawing by G. Reverdin. H. 21" x W. 13½". Published in London, 1 April 1830 after an antique cameo (per inscription.) Lithograph.

The Department of Earth, Space and Graphic Sciences, United States Military Academy

33. Copy of a Roman soldier after the Antique by Cadet Jefferson Davis (USMA 1828). H. 19½" x W. 17 3/4". Pencil and Charcoal drawing.

West Point Museum Collections, United States Military Academy

34. Indians and Trader by Cadet Ulysses S. Grant (USMA 1843). H. 10½" x W. 14½". Watercolor.

West Point Museum Collections, United States Military Academy

35. Drawing by Cadet Ulysses S. Grant (USMA 1843). H. 13½" x W. 11". Watercolor. Subject suggests four figures preparing to enter a city through an arch.

Special Collections Division, U.S. Military Academy Library

36. Drawing of Classical Figures by Cadet John Farley (USMA 1823). H. 9 1/8" x W. 12 5/8". Watercolor.

The Department of Earth, Space and Graphic Sciences, United States Military Academy

37. Engraving of Classical Figure with Putti by F. Bartolozzi. H. 9 3/4" x W. 11 3/4".

The Department of Earth, Space and Graphic Sciences, United States Military Academy

38. Cover to "Song of the Graduates", 1852, by Cadet James Abbott McNeill Whistler (USMA 1855). H. 11" x W. 9". Lithograph.

West Point Museum Collections, United States Military Academy

39. *On Post Duty at West Point: An Encampment* by Cadet James Abbott McNeill Whistler (USMA 1855). H. 5 7/8" x W. 9¼". Gouache and ink drawing.

Special Collections Division, U.S. Military Academy Library

40. Study of Entwined Trees by Cadet Seth Eastman (USMA 1829). H. 4 3/4" x W. 9¼". Watercolor.

West Point Museum Collections, United States Military Academy

41. Study of Tree Trunk by Cadet Seth Eastman (USMA 1829). H. 4 3/4" x W. 9¼". Watercolor.

West Point Museum Collections, United States Military Academy

42. *View of the Hudson* by Cadet Seth Eastman (USMA 1829) H. 12¼ x W. 16¼. Oil on board.

West Point Museum Collections, United States Military Academy

43. *Man Giving Flowers to a Young Woman* by Cadet John Daniel Kurtz (USMA 1842). H. 7½" x W. 9½". Pen drawing.

The Department of Earth, Space and Graphic Sciences, United States Military Academy

44. *Musician with Pegasus* by Cadet Truman Seymour (USMA 1846). H. 8" x W. 10½". Pen drawing.

The Department of Earth, Space and Graphic Sciences, United States Military Academy

45. *Fortifications Cannon* by Cadet Charles William Whipple (USMA 1868). H. 103/4" x W. 17". Watercolor.

The Department of Earth, Space and Graphic Sciences, United States Military Academy

46. *Mechanical Drawing of nut and bolt---Side and Top View* by Cadet Alexander DuBois Schenck (USMA 1867). H. 18½" x W. 11". Watercolor.

The Department of Earth, Space and Graphic Sciences, United States Military Academy

47. *Soldier* by Cadet Alexander DuBois Schenck (USMA 1867). H. 12 3/4" x W. 9½". Pen drawing.

West Point Museum Collections, United States Military Academy

48. *Tête D'Horace* engraved by Jacques Noel after David's *Oath of the Horatii*. H. 17" x W. 12". Lithograph.

The Department of Earth, Space and Graphic Sciences, United States Military Academy

49. Drawing of a soldier clubbing a centaur by Cadet William Tecumseh Sherman (USMA 1840). H. 24½" x W. 21". Chalk drawing.

West Point Museum Collections, United States Military Academy

50. Head of a soldier drawn from the Antique by Cadet Joseph T. Boyd (USMA 1839). H. 14 3/4" x W. 12 7/8". Charcoal.

The Department of Earth, Space and Graphic Sciences, United States Military Academy

51. *View of Duomo, Florence,* by Cadet Truman Seymour (USMA 1846). H. 12 5/8" x W. 8½". Watercolor. Not dated, although probably executed after Seymour visited Florence in 1879.

West Point Museum Collections, United States Military Academy

52. *View of Palazzo Vecchio* by Cadet Truman Seymour (USMA 1846). H.11 3/4" x W. 13 3/4". Watercolor. Not dated, but as with Catalog Number 51, the watercolor probably dates from around 1879.

West Point Museum Collections, United States *Military Academy*

53. *Cadet writing Examination* by Cadet James G. Benton (USMA 1842). H. 6 3/4" x W. 4 3/4". Watercolor.

Special Collections Division, U.S. Military Academy Library

54. *Nordenfeldt 14 PDR. R.F. Gun* by Cadet Hamilton Hawkins (USMA 1894). H. 18" x W. 34". Pen and watercolor.

West Point Museum Collections, United States Military Academy

55. *Church of the Holy Innocents* for *The Home Book of the Picturesque,* published in 1852. H. 4" x W. 5½". Engraved by S.V. Hunt.

Special Collections Division, U.S. Military Academy Library

56. *Fort Putnam* from *The American Landscape:* No. 1 New York: Elam Bliss, 1830. Page 11. H. 4½" x W. 6 1/8". Etched by James Smillie and finished by A.B. Durand.

Lent by William Cullen Bryant, II Garrison, New York